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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: BELARUS DENIES PARTY FOR FREEDOM AND PROGRESS REGISTRATION
FOR FOURTH TIME

REF: A. MINSK 261

[1](#)B. MINSK 275

[1](#)1. (U) On August 26, the Belarus Supreme Court refused to overturn an earlier denial of registration of the Party for Freedom and Progress (PFP). This was the party's fourth registration attempt since 2003.

[1](#)2. (U) During the appeal hearing, the Belarus Ministry of Justice representative claimed that the PFP failed to obtain the required number of petition signatures, indicating that the PFP only had 691 of the required 1000 valid signatures needed to register a political party. (The group claimed they had 1011.) Further, MOJ claimed that there were discrepancies between the names of people listed as being at founding conventions and those who were actually present, and that 91 of the group's followers were still students and could not be counted toward the number of participants. In addition, MOJ claimed that some of those listed as being founders denied being party members, in addition to several alleged bureaucratic mistakes with paperwork, including missing dates of birth and patronymic names.

[1](#)3. (U) While not directly addressing the MOJ's claims in their response, the PFP countered that the registration process was complex and that the technical errors made in the registration filing could have been easily corrected had the MOJ allowed the PFP the opportunity. The PFP also alleged that the MOJ coerced some of the petition signers to recant their support of the group during the MOJ's investigation. PFP members asked for a different judge at the start of the hearing; after a 30 minutes recess, the judge in question issued a decision to keep himself on the case.

[1](#)4. (U) The PFP has not indicated whether they will attempt to register the party again. Lacking registration, group members risk arrest for participating in the activities of an unregistered organization.

[1](#)5. (SBU) COMMENT: The PFP's registration denial is the third in a recent series of almost identical MOJ decisions upheld by the Supreme Court, including the July refusal of the Belarus Christian Democracy group and the August refusal of the Nasha Vyasna human rights NGO. The GOB continues to use exacting enforcement of bureaucratic rules as a tool to prevent groups from registering, with denials based in part on typographical mistakes, missing patronymic names, incorrect job titles, and in one case, capitalization of a word ("Vyasna", reftel). The MOJ has also been accused of using pressure to encourage petition signers to recant earlier support, thereby denying groups of the necessary number of petition signatures for registration. Civil registration is required for groups to operate in Belarus, and cases such as these demonstrate the GOB's ability to use civil registration as a tool to effectively regulate who is able to legally participate in the country's political process.

SCANLAN